

VZCZCXRO9281  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #3695/01 3530727  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 180727Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5439  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1260  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6621  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5150  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9293  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1827  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5989  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003695

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WILDER AND PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: ABHISIT VEJJAJIVA FORMALLY BECOMES THAI PRIME  
MINISTER; THAKSIN TELLS SUPPORTERS TO KEEP FIGHTING

REF: A. BANGKOK 3648 (ABHISIT ELECTED)  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3529 (COURT DISSOLVES PPP)  
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 3520 (STALEMATE DRAGS ON)  
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 3492 (MOB SHUTS AIRPORT)  
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 3426 (LETHAL EXPLOSION)

BANGKOK 00003695 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b and d).

#### SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Abhisit Vejjajiva on December 17 received the royal command from King Bhumibol, formally becoming Thailand's Prime Minister in the wake of the December 15 parliamentary vote. He delivered an eloquent speech, partially in English, pledging to work on behalf of all Thais, end Thailand's "failed politics," restore Thailand's international image, and move quickly to address economic problems. Abhisit's announcement of the composition of his cabinet appears imminent. Former Prime Minister Thaksin, whose official passport already has been revoked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, phoned in to a December 16 fundraiser held by his supporters vowing to fight on. The Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for six pro-Thaksin demonstrators who engaged in violent acts outside the parliament on December 15.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: One can find irony in Abhisit's pledge to end "failed politics," as he owes his election as Prime Minister to the recent disorder, culminating in the closure of Bangkok's airports in late November. That disorder appeared to hasten the Constitutional Court's dissolution of the previous ruling People's Power Party and convince many in the Bangkok elite, including its usually apolitical big businessmen, that it was necessary to establish a new government unaligned with former Prime Minister Thaksin.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment, cont.: The newest pro-Thaksin party, Puea Thai, remains the largest single party in the parliament, however, despite defections. In part because the current Constitution strengthened checks on the power of the Prime Minister, to prevent the rise of another Thaksin-like figure, Abhisit will be highly vulnerable to the new opposition's efforts in the legislature to pull him down. Despite the minor ruckus in front of parliament December 15, it remains

unclear to what extent Thaksin's redshirt allies will emulate the People's Alliance for Democracy's aggressive street tactics. End Summary and Comment.

#### ABHISIT RECEIVES ROYAL COMMAND

-----

14. (U) On December 17, Abhisit Vejjajiva received the royal command from King Bhumibol that formally appointed him as Prime Minister in the wake of the December 15 parliamentary vote electing him. Following his appointment, Abhisit delivered a televised speech emphasizing national reconciliation, saying he would serve as Prime Minister of all Thais. Citing the need for unity, Abhisit pledged to "end failed politics" and rely on justice, the rule of law, and democracy. He also pledged fast action to aid Thailand's economy.

15. (U) Switching to English, Abhisit sought to reassure the international community that the recent airport closures forced by People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protests would not recur. He pledged also that, by late January, Thailand would be ready to host the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok (the Summit having previously been delayed by PAD demonstrations). (Note: ASEAN FMs agreed December 15 in Jakarta that the Summit would take place February 24-26.)

#### CABINET ANNOUNCEMENT IMMINENT

-----

16. (C) Most political observers expect Abhisit to announce the composition of his cabinet imminently amidst intense public speculation. Former Ambassador to the U.S. (2004-2005) Kasit Piromya remains likely to become Foreign Minister, but

BANGKOK 00003695 002.2 OF 002

control over some other (more lucrative) positions has become the focus of continued jostling between the Democrat Party and the six other groupings of allied MPs (some being members of dissolved parties who have not yet established new formal affiliations). The Democrats face a difficult balancing act ahead; the defection of a single large coalition partner, or several of the smaller ones, would tilt the parliamentary balance back in favor of the pro-Thaksin Puea Thai Party.

#### THAKSIN PHONES IN TO FUND-RAISER; WARRANTS FOR SUPPORTERS

-----

17. (U) Former Prime Minister Thaksin phoned in to a fund-raiser organized by the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) on December 17. (The UDD is a political group that organizes pro-Thaksin demonstrations. Its sympathizers are generally known as "redshirts.") According to media reports, Thaksin accused the courts and the Army of pressuring his former coalition partners to switch to the Democrat Party, vowed to keep fighting to return someday to Thailand and resume his political career, and asked his supporters to maintain their efforts. (Thaksin himself is under pressure; immediately after Abhisit's election as Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced it would revoke Thaksin's official passport. The Ministry did not comment on the disposition of Thaksin's ordinary passport.)

18. (U) The Criminal Court on December 17 issued arrest warrants for six people involved in violent pro-Thaksin demonstrations outside of the parliament on December 15 (ref A). The police have also said publicly that they will arrest those who commit violent acts.

19. (C) Comment: There is reason to believe that the security forces and the courts may be significantly less tolerant of disorderly acts by Thaksin supporters than they were of the PAD's. (To date, no court has issued any arrest warrant for PAD leaders based on the recent airport takeovers.) Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the security forces

will be able or willing to prevent political violence from either side, or whether the largely passive posture in play since August will continue. As far as we know, the security forces have yet to identify the individuals who recently fired grenades into PAD demonstrations, with lethal effect (refs B-E). Police near the entrance to parliament where the December 15 car stoning took place made no effort to prevent the altercation from occurring.

JOHN